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# Request for the inclusion of a supplementary item in the agenda of the sixty-third session

## Natural resources and conflict

## Identical letters dated 25 July 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to request, pursuant to rule 14 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the inclusion of a supplementary item, to be considered directly in plenary meeting, entitled "Natural resources and conflict" in the agenda of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly under the heading "Maintenance of international peace and security".

In accordance with rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, an explanatory memorandum in support of the above request is annexed to the present letter.

I have further the honour to request that the present letter and its annex be circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

(*Signed*) Jan **Grauls**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Belgium
to the United Nations in New York

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# Annex

## Explanatory memorandum

### Background

1. The link between natural resources and conflict is well documented both at the conceptual level and in the context of specific conflict situations. Growing attention to this question has stimulated various responses, including, but not exclusively, within the United Nations. It has generated discussion in various forums, including in the Security Council, which held a thematic debate on this issue under the Belgian presidency in June 2007. On 8 May 2008, the Working Group on Lessons Learned of the Peacebuilding Commission also had a horizontal discussion on the issue.

2. The policy debate on this issue has long been focused on particular countries or narrowed down to specific dimensions. The thematic debate organized by Belgium on this subject during its presidency of the Security Council in June 2007 was intended to broaden the understanding in a horizontal way. This debate was, inter alia, instrumental in underlining that natural resources, in certain circumstances, must be approached from a peace and security point of view. A number of delegations, however, highlighted that this issue cannot be narrowed down to a peace and security issue. Natural resources are first and foremost a source of development for many countries, and governance of a country's own natural resources is an essential part of its national sovereignty. The real issue, when talking about natural resources and conflict, is how to maintain or revert to this "normal situation" in those countries where natural resources become an element of conflict. In other terms, how to pull natural resources out of the sphere of peace and security and to bring them back where they belong, in the sphere of national development? This requires a broad approach, taking into account various aspects.

3. An approach to better understand the different aspects of the issue is to make a distinction between the successive phases of a (potential) conflict. The challenges are different in each phase; the responses of the international community and the actors involved must also be different.

- In case of conflict, the challenge is how to prevent the exploitation of natural resources from contributing to the conflict.
- In a post-conflict situation, the emphasis shifts towards promoting the exploitation of natural resources as an engine for development. Peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts of the national government, of multilateral institutions such as the Peacebuilding Commission or the international financial institutions, of the international donor community and of civil society actors need to pay appropriate attention to the issue of natural resource governance, each with their own specificity.
- From a conflict prevention perspective, the question is how to prevent natural resources from becoming a source of instability or internal conflict. Governance of natural resources is a key issue in this respect. This is essentially a matter of national sovereignty. There is, however, room for international cooperation, exchanges of expertise and best practices, institutional capacity-building and awareness-raising about the issues involved.

4. When addressing the link between natural resources and conflict, a wide variety of stakeholders have to be involved. Governments of producing, transit and importing countries need to cooperate to ensure the efficiency and transparency of the exploitation of and trade in natural resources and to fight against illegal trafficking and exploitation. The United Nations, other multilateral bodies and regional organizations can provide the appropriate forums and instruments for such cooperation, each with their specificity. The private sector in its various dimensions (extractive industries, brokers, traders and so forth) and civil society have their own responsibilities.

**Natural resources and conflict on the agenda of the General Assembly**

5. Belgium is convinced that the question of natural resources and conflict is multifaceted and deserves a broad debate tying together its many dimensions. In this regard, the United Nations General Assembly offers an inclusive and comprehensive governmental forum for such a cross-cutting debate.

6. The aim of such a debate would be:

- to stimulate further reflection on how the exploitation of natural resources can play a role in certain conflicts, and on how to ensure that natural resources become a source of development
- to better understand what the international community can do to assist governments in this area, and what the responsibilities of the various concerned actors are, including the private sector and regional organizations
- to take stock of ongoing initiatives and explore how their effectiveness can be strengthened.

7. No item currently on the agenda of the General Assembly offers a scope broad enough to cover all aspects of such a debate. Belgium therefore proposes the inclusion of a supplementary item entitled "Natural resources and conflict" in the agenda of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly.